

ROTHBURY RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL.Report of Medical Officer of Health
for the Year 1950.

Major Browne, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I beg to present my report for the year 1950.

The area of the Rothbury Rural District is 167,187 acres, and the estimated population for the middle of the year was 5,679, a decrease of one in 1949.

The number of Births registered was 143, eleven more than in 1949. Males numbered 74 and Females 69. Of these 78 came from other districts leaving 65 belonging to the Rothbury Rural Area. The birth-rate per 1,000 for the Rural District was 13.2, the rate for England and Wales being 15.8. There were 2 still-births, rate per 1,000 being 0.35 and two illegitimate births. Approximately 130 babies were born at the Cottage Hospital.

The number of Deaths belonging to the District was 76 - 36 males and 40 females including 16 transferred deaths which occurred and were registered in other districts. The death rate was 13.3 per 1,000 compared with 11.6 for England and Wales. There were two deaths of infants under one year of age. There was no maternal death following childbirth and no death from measles or whooping cough. Two deaths were due to motor accidents, 3 to other accidents and two to suicide. Twenty one persons died between the ages of 70 and 80, twenty one between 80 and 90 and five 90 or over. The greatest number of deaths was registered in the month of April and the least in September and October.

The chief causes of death were:-

Heart and other diseases of the circulatory system	31.
Apoplexy and cerebral thrombosis	11
Influenza, pneumonia and bronchitis	9
Cancer	5

In the case of cancer a satisfactory reduction of 8 compared with 1949.

Notifications of Infectious Diseases. Total number of cases 191, an increase of 119 on the previous year. These were classified as follows:-

Dysentery	84	Whooping Cough	11
Measles	53	Scarlet Fever	10
Erysipelas	15	Poliomyelitis	3
Pneumonia	14	Puerperal pyrexia	1

Four cases of pneumonia proved fatal. No case of food poisoning was recorded and for the third year in succession no case of diphtheria. The chief cause of this great increase of notifications was Dysentery. These began to reach me in the second week of December and were to continue till the end of January of this year of 1951. Cases were largely concentrated in Longframlington where some 30 were notified up to the end of the year. The recorded exciting and predisposing causes of dysentery are numerous including want of, or improper quality of food, abundant use of salt or tinned meats; exclusive diet of fresh meat; insufficiently cooked grain; a long continued monotonous diet, and dyspeptic conditions. Where the poison originates is quite another question. The chief mode in which the poison is introduced into the system however is by means of contaminated drinking water. There are probably other sources of infection such as the patients stained clothing or bed linen, privies, dust and flies especially flies.

The epidemic was of a mild nature and was complicated by the fact that a gastro-enteric form of influenza with many similar symptoms was prevalent at the same time.

TUBERCULOSIS. There were 13 cases notified compared with one in the previous year. Eight cases related to the lungs, four to the glands and one to the lining membrane of the brain. During the year there were two deaths from tuberculosis, rate per 1000 being 0.35, that for England and Wales 0.36. At the end of the June quarter I had twenty five cases on my register.

WATER SUPPLY AND SEWERAGE I am again indebted to the Sanitary Inspector for the following brief reports:-

"Water Supplies - All supplies under the direct control of the Council were satisfactory during the year. The scheme submitted to the Ministry of Health for the Village of Hepple was still under consideration at 31st December, 1950. No major extensions to the water mains have been made other than to service houses under construction. The Council supply approximately 60% of the population."

"Sewerage- No changes have taken place during the year. A scheme to lay new sewers and provide disposal works for the Village of Whittingham has been prepared and submitted to the Ministry for approval. It is hoped to have all formal consents during 1951."

"Housing- Fifty houses were completed by the Council during the year, and schemes approved for a further 36 to be built in 1951. Houses erected by private individuals numbered 4. Sixteen applications for grants under the Housing Act, 1949 towards improving properties were received. Ten of these were approved with the remainder under consideration by the Regional Office of the Ministry of Health."

Commentary.

In striking contrast to 1949 the year 1950 was one of rain and lack of sunshine, and really wintry conditions set in before the end of October.

The most disturbing item in this report is the fact that tuberculosis cases increased from one in 1949 to 13 - but we must remember that one notification for the year is quite exceptional and our average over several years is about ten, and our 13 cases give us practically the same rate as that for England and Wales. But in my view, a district such as ours should have a tuberculosis rate below the average for the whole country. We have practically no overcrowding, no air pollution, no mining, and, as a rule, lead an outdoor life. With early diagnosis, immediate isolation and rest - preferably in a sanatorium we ought to be able to reduce infection if not cure the patient.

Regarding the food position in 1950 I can only repeat what I said last year that "the food position showed little improvement in quantity or quality. The microscopical ration of indigestible meat compelled people to make up with starchy carbohydrates especially potatoes and bread. Last year we ate 245 lbs of potatoes; before the War we used to eat 176 lbs and our consumption of cereals was 107 per cent of what it used to be. This excessive consumption of starchy food was the cause of many alimentary troubles, varying from simple dyspepsia to duodenal and gastric ulceration which was prevalent last year. The milk supply was well maintained. In 1950 we drank 160 per cent of this perfect food on the pre-war consumption, and in my opinion, it is largely due to this fact that the health of the people has been maintained and of the children probably improved. Fish, eggs and green vegetables also helped to fill the vacuum for those who could afford them.

Medical research still goes on. Many serious diseases have been conquered in this generation, but the scourge of cancer still baffles scientists, But surely the day will dawn when the cause of this monster will be brought to light and one more brilliant victory of medical research will be added to the list.

A.S. HEDLEY.
September, 1951